



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Blair Ewing

For Immediate Release

April 18, 2002

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Ewing urges more County support for clinics, clients in current budget...

COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS REMAINS CRITICAL AS TWO MORE CLINICS HALT NEW ADMISSIONS

The crisis in Montgomery County's faltering mental health system grew worse this week with the announcement that two more private clinics, supported by the County, are halting new admissions – at least for now. The revelation came at a Tuesday night public hearing on a measure sponsored by Councilmember Blair Ewing that would help the clinics meet the demand for mental health services by County residents by appropriating an additional \$645,000.

"The Washington Assessment & Therapy Services (WATS) has closed intake in Montgomery County because we have a dire shortage of psychiatric coverage and have not been able to find a psychiatrist," Susan Wynne, site manager of the WATS Silver Spring clinic told Councilmembers. WATS closed new admissions on April 12.

In addition, Jeff Carswell of Affiliated Sante Group, which runs another County outpatient mental health clinic, revealed to Councilmembers that his clinic stopped all new admissions on April 8 until May 1, at least, and perhaps beyond.

"This is further evidence that the County's mental health system – despite the best efforts of heroic mental health professionals and clinic workers – is failing those in need," said Councilmember Ewing, who chairs the Council's Health and Human Services Committee.

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“As the recent report of the independent Blue Ribbon Task Force on Mental Health report demonstrated, our problems are systemic.

- The state of Maryland is not meeting its obligation to adequately fund the system we privatized a half dozen years ago and the federal government is not adequately funding Medicare patients.
- The network of available mental health providers touted by County and state officials as our back-up to the ailing clinics is, in the words of the report, a ‘phantom network.’
- Even the \$870,000 in emergency monies -- approved by the Council last October to help the clinics keep their doors open -- did not begin to reach clinics until January due to delays in government processing.”

Councilmember Ewing, who has led the charge for a ‘can-do’ policy on addressing the mental health issue on the County and state level over the past two years, is urging Council approval of the supplemental appropriation for \$645,000. It would provide outpatient mental health clinics with \$370,000, set aside \$100,000 for Medicare, gray zone, and uninsured clients most at-risk, appropriate \$100,000 for critically-needed and underfunded care managers, and fund a \$75,000 independent clinical assessment.

At the Tuesday night hearing, Ewing’s proposal won support from dozens of mental health professionals, clients, and community organizations, including the Montgomery County League of Women Voters.

“While we work to restructure a mental health system that can provide quality care for all who need it, we also need to offer a ‘safety net’ so that those most at-risk do no harm to themselves or others and so they don’t end up on the street, in a homeless shelter, or in our County jails.

“This Council has stepped up to the plate over the past year to meet these critical needs, even as the state of Maryland and the County Executive were saying that all was rosy or played the blame game. We’ve got to stay the course and meet this critical need – if not in this supplemental appropriation then in the coming year’s budget now before us.”

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